DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 025 378 RE 001 352

By- Robertson, Jean E.

Teacher Education: Privileges and Problems Associated with Reading Programs in Developing Countries.

Pub Date Apr 68

Note- 14p.; Paper presented at International Reading Association conference, Boston, Mass., April 24-27, 1968.

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.80

Descriptors- *Attitudes, Communication Problems, *Developing Nations, *Literacy, *Reading Instruction, Second Language Learning, Social Attitudes, Social Problems, *Teacher Education, Technological Advancement

The problems of teacher education in developing nations are discussed. Blending new knowledge with cultural heritage so that the personal cultural synthesis demanded of new literates is effected without disrupting social structures is complicated by the language problem. The impact of the written word on a society dependent on oral communication results in resistance to change that restructures existing social organization. The problem of time needed by emerging nations is complicated by their impatience and desire for the best. A fourth problem lies in the consideration of personal and national needs. These problems are likened to familiar problems in reading instruction: (1) blending, (2) comprehension, (3) rate, and (4) personal reading satisfaction. They point up the need for the development of new sets of attitudes, for innovations which effect more rapid acceptance of change, and consideration of personal and national needs. More understanding and involvement by educators from developed nations is imperative for world understanding. (NS)

IRA, Boston, 1968

Dr. Jean E. Robertson
Associate Professor
Department of Elementary Education
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

ED025378

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

TEACHER EDUCATION: PRIVILEGES AND PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH READING PROGRAMS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Symposium IV-Reading on the International Scene

Developing Reading Programs in Emerging Nations

ED025378 RE 001 352

Malieu (5, p. 414), the Director General of UNESCO, reported last November that despite all efforts of past years and the progress of recent years, one-third of the world's children of school age still have no school to go to and about one-half of the adults in the world are illiterate. Despite the immensity of the problem the less developed countries are experiencing such a surge of growth and renewal that a world crisis in education has developed. The teacher is a key person in meeting this crisis if his professional education has been adequate.

This paper will discuss teacher education in developing countries focussing on selected problems and privileges of reading teachers in schools. Four problem areas will be discussed each under a caption

familiar to investigators of the reading process: problems of 'blending', 'comprehension', 'rate' and 'personal reading satisfaction'. 'Privileges' in this paper refer to the special advantages which educators from more developed countries can have when working with educators from less developed countries, the privileges of understanding and of guiding others into understanding problems of teacher education associated with reading programs.

The magnitude of the total problem of which teacher education is a part was recorded in the UNESCO Chronicle (1, p. 51). "The conditions for development have not yet been secured in the majority of developing countries" and "...the gap between the developed countries and the developing countries is still widening and creating greater social, political and economic tensions." The problem continues to grow. We have not yet advanced to the place where the problem is diminishing. It is imperative, therefore, that all forces which can hasten development in emerging countries be marshalled.

The education of the masses is a vital part of the development of emerging nations as the skills of reading and writing are means to ends which can embrace any avenue of human welfare, social progress, and political growth. Since 1947 when the work of UNESCO gave a positive impetus to the eradication of illiteracy, the three terms of 'literacy', 'fundamental education' and 'community development' although defined differently in widely scattered areas of the world have nonetheless reflected the increasing emphasis on the national, social and economic environment of students who are striving to become literate. Teacher education programs have little relevance if planned apart from personal student needs and the national needs of the country in which students study.

To develop literacy programs and to extend them to ensure that a functional level of literacy which is sufficient to allow the individual if necessary on his own to extend his range of knowledge, necessitates educational planning of which teacher education is again an integral part. The particular plan adopted should be integrated with the general and specialized national needs, should prevent dropouts, should include women and girls, and should teach relevant content and if necessary use methods which may represent radical deviations from the traditional. Each of these stipulations represents a particular problem of some literacy programs and it is the underlying issues of these problems which should be identified and provided for in teacher education if adequate plans are to be formulated. What too are some of the privileges that can be enjoyed by educators from more developed countries?

Personal experience has confirmed the suggestions to follow: nine years in Ethiopia as a teacher and administrator both for the Imperial Ethiopian Government and for the private school system, two years as organizer in Canada of the Uganda Primary Teachers Pilot Project under joint sponsorship of the Canadian Government External Aid Office and the University of Alberta, and three years as a staff member associated with the Intercultural Education Program of the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta.

A Blending Problem. Children who have difficulty with word synthesis because they cannot blend sounds orally are a particular problem to reading teachers. Similarly educators responsible for teacher education in developing countries ponder over the personal cultural synthesis which learning to read demands of new literates,

problems which require them to blend the 'new' with the 'old', 'ours' with 'theirs', and the 'official' with the 'traditional'.

Teachers involved in literacy programs should be taught how to help readers reach forth for new knowledge and to use it judiciously without discarding the heritage of the past. This heritage could be narrated often in reading materials graded in difficulty for new readers but sometimes it is either not available to educational publishers or not acceptable to them. Mass media such as books bring about new polarizations of individuals and groups in a developing country. When only oral communication existed as a means to remember best the things people felt most deeply, many times the older men guarded each word jealously and ceremoniously passed on their verbal treasure to tightly knit social groups. These older men were rich in experience and understanding and were masters of oral communication. If oral treasures are captured in print, the older men have to relinguish their revered place as communicators in the tribal society to a young lad or two who can read. Not only is this most difficult for the older men but in many cases it is undesirable that the very young assume the task because they lack the maturity to interpret many of the experiences satisfactorily. To prevent this shift in influence within their tribal society from themselves to a youthful teacher and his students, some older people withhold the recitation of the group's heritage, and reading materials for new adult literates have other content exclusively.

Occasionally the proverbs and narrations are available but young editors who are recent graduates from universities and who may be too zealous for rapid conformity to the technological age consider these communications from past centuries too binding or irrelevant, and deliberately ignore them.

In both instances the opportunity to blend the new in the culture with the old is lost. To those living in more highly developed countries comes the opportunity to be aware of these blending problems the people of emerging countries face, to understand, and to patiently instruct so the wisdom of the past is passed on and so those who have transmitted it previously retain sufficient status to prevent a premature social collapse of any group structure by removing important people from their roles before acceptable substitutes are provided.

The technological advances of more developed countries must be blended with the existing economic structure of the developing country. Because of the urgency of the situation adult workers often are taught to read just before they begin a new job and often are required to educate themselves for advancements in industry through their own reading. Time may not be available to reading teachers to develop an extensive general vocabulary before technical terms are introduced. The old teaching methods and materials are often insufficient for the comprehension tasks facing adult readers and reading teachers must devise teacher education programs to cope with the nature and the urgency of the need. Educators have the privilege of understanding the need of the new literates to vault over the centuries and to approach our present position as developed countries within a generation or two. But our materials and methods may be too much a part of us and parting with some of the icons sitting on the reading god shelf may be very difficult! Schramm (7), a world authority on mass media development, sees exciting new possibilities within the next decade for educational radio and television using communication satellites. In teacher education work

in developed countries the privilege is ours to relinguish less effective methods and to be ready to work through new media with new methods and new materials.

In many emerging countries teachers are faced with the complex problem of making people literate in a language other than their tribal tongue. As language carries the culture of the people, to adopt another's language is in many instances tantamount to adopting different laws and customs. These shifts can be upsetting for the individuals and create far reaching changes in the socio-economic and political structure of the tribal society. Some countries could not agree which tribal tongue should be the official one so they adopted English. Considerable emphasis then is placed upon the teaching of English. The teaching of English as a second language differs greatly from the teaching of English as a first language, a fact which many educators acknowledge but neglect in their classroom practice. Yet it is here that the linguist and the teacher education staff could work together in teacher education courses to analyze and compare the two languages so similarities between them could be capitalized upon and their differences stressed. It is here also that the anthropologist and the teacher education staff could work together to identify significant cultural differences in the learning situation.

Teachers of reading in developed countries have the privilege of being much more sensitive than they often are. Actions belie sensitivity as cartons of well used older editions of basal readers are shipped to developing countries. The books are old and dog-eared so the recipients conclude they rate second best with the senders. The culture depicted is ours not theirs so lengthy explanations must form a major

part of the daily reading lessons if even minimum student comprehension is to be attained. How much better it would be if instead sensitivity sessions were organized in which listening and learning about the other culture were the first objective. Then summer work sessions with the nationals of the other culture could follow with guidance provided in various tasks associated with the production of reading materials. There would be no insistence that particular methods, materials, or techniques be employed but freedom would be allowed the teachers of developing countries to determine their own direction even if other educators believed it to be a poorer choice.

Greenberg (2, p. 3) discussed the problems adults face who have been transplanted to a foreign land of new and strange language and customs, problems which adults of one tribe also have when they must become literate in a second official language of another tribe. The patterns of thought--vocabulary, pronunciation and sentence structure --that had become natural and habitual in their earlier life and that were once accepted and beneficial may now become intrusions and mistakes when they are faced with the second language. He believes these language difficulties of transplanted adults are in many respects the counterpart of a neurotic habit. This is a part of the blending problem and it is our privilege to understand and to provide some answers in our teacher education programs.

A Comprehension Problem. A child who cannot understand what he reads is in serious trouble. The reading teacher, too, who does not understand the impact of the shift of emphasis in a developing country from the oral word to the written word is in serious trouble in his teacher education program. The advent of the printed word into a

culture which previously depended entirely upon the spoken word brings conflict and precipitates basic changes. It is imperative that educators comprehend the problem. Riesman (6, pp. 7-8) voiced the problem in these words, "What I am getting at is that the spoken or sung word is particularly impressive when it monopolizes the symbolic environment; but once books have entered that environment the social organization can never be the same again. Books bring with them detachment and a critical attitude that is not possible in a society dependent on the spoken word."

The written word does change the social organization, and it is insufficient to attend only to the blending of the new with the old as indicated previously. An understanding of both the old and the new is essential if the blending process is to be effective.

Let me return to Riesman (6, pp. 8, 13, 34). People who depend upon oral communication are bound one to the other and to the group of which both are a part. As the memorable words in the culture are often those which are most charged with emotion, the individual is tied emotionally to his group. The printed word breaks this tie and allows the reader to contemplate and make comparisons from group to group and to try on new emotions. A book then "...creates space around people and even isolates them in some ways." These same changes have been and still are a part of our culture but because they have taken place more slowly we are not always aware of the explosive nature of the same changes in developing countries. Once again it is our privilege to comprehend this problem.

It should be clear to us why the older people within the developing country resist changes which will restructure existing social organization and why they are afraid often to become literate themselves hiding behind an attitude of indifference or even of antagonism. These older people often resist the education of their young because of the fear that the young people will lose their identity with the group. In a sense they are right. Young people once literate communicate with many people holding widely differing points of view but their parents not so privileged confine themselves to a restricted range of thoughts, and a mental rift develops between young and old.

Too frequently reading teachers and those in teacher education institutions proceed with their programs with little thought of the sociological implications of their task. The present increased attention to the sociological settings of reading is gratifying but it needs to be extended and sustained. As educators it is our privilege to enlist sociologists as members of our planning and teaching teams. In reading programs of developing countries the need is most urgent.

Jenkinson (4, pp. 18-19) spoke of the world problem of reading at the First World Congress on Reading and commented that the demands of an automated society will make economic outcasts of those who reach only a functional literacy level. As marginal literates they present one of the greatest social and economic problems in modern highly industrialized nations. She would more fully define literacy as technological literacy, an academic equivalent to approximately seven years of schooling which would equip the student with considerable skill in word recognition, "a wider reading vocabulary and an increasing

ability to cope with the expanding complexities of ideas and their expression." As developing countries advance technologically, the teacher education reading programs must be prepared to cope with these economic demands.

Hanson (3, p. 36) speaking particularly of the economic progress of African nations warned that more than knowledge and new technical skills is needed in nations that would be modern. They need a whole set of attitudes which create the climate for modernization: a spirit of innovation, of adventure, and of willingness to be physically involved in a task other than sitting behind a desk. The responsibility of the school is to aid in the development of these attitudes. It is not easy for educators of more developed countries to understand the tendency of new literates to seek the comparative security of a government desk job because we are accustomed to the benefits of social security, medical health plans, and pensions and insurance plans. Even when we do serve overseas we usually continue these benefits during the term of our assignment. Most educators think seriously before changing employment to ensure that the security gained will not be disturbed. Young people in developing countries do not ask educators from abroad to cast away their security but they do ask for recognition of the fact that educators from more developed countries often ask them to give up security they themselves cling to. Our awareness of their position and ours is a privilege and a challenge.

A Rate Problem. As the child learns his basic reading skills and habits he increases his reading rate. He is encouraged to do this so the most efficient use of his reading time is made in varying his rate to suit his purpose. In the educational systems of developing

countries the teacher education programs are faced with serious rate problems. Staff members and students acknowledge that developing countries need to move as quickly as possible toward an acceptable and tolerable level of technological and social development. But change to be acceptable and permanent necessitates a certain period of readiness so a new personal and social orientation is effected rather than disorientation. Much more time for development has been available to us in our countries than is available to developing countries now. Many young people of emerging countries today are insisting that development in every facet of the lives of people be made too quickly with the result that many freedoms are acquired without the much needed restrictions and disciplines of the responsibilities that must accompany the changes.

As the gulf between the developing and the developed countries continues to widen the problem of rate of development increases. Tensions build and communication channels between groups of older and younger people clog. Pent up emotions and displays of raw power culminate in demonstrations and riots. Despite the dimensions of the problem teacher education staff members can contribute by earnestly studying ways of innovating which will meet the demands to effect changes sooner more acceptably. Perhaps the reading lessons could be taken to workers on the job and they could develop more skills and abilities through the reading materials currently demanding their attention. Perhaps too, the education of the young could be carried back to their tribal group more consistently so contact would be maintained and the continuous series of school years segregating students and families so common in many developing countries would be replaced.

The people of developing countries cannot wait as we waited over the decades and the centuries but perhaps a less tumultuous change would result if the people effected some of the changes they desired as they learned to read and write.

The problem can become more complicated if some in developing countries believe that they are receiving a second class education when the program, methods and materials do not parallel those of a developed country with which they have been in touch. They often insist on being taught to read with methods more suitable to other countries and languages, and with books whose reading materials do not convey their own culture. Educators in teacher education programs need much tact in explaining why these programs which worked so well in one setting may not be as effective in another. We should understand though the intensity of the desire of young people to have the best program available.

A Personal Reading Satisfaction Problem. Many times in our own more developed countries educators have been faced with the revelation that although many children can read well, for one reason or another they derive little satisfaction from reading and only pursue the task when they must. Understanding teachers, therefore, seek to inculcate a love for reading in the students or at least a respect for the dividends the reading process can pay. It is not uncommon in the educational systems of the developing countries for the individual, his personal needs and satisfactions, to be submerged in the national needs. Students may feel they are being swept along in predetermined courses which offer fewer choices than would be available in more developed countries. Although no immediate and satisfactory solution

may be available to the student, teacher education personnel can help students keep an overall personal perspective so they derive great satisfaction in communicating well themselves and in teaching their students.

The problems of teacher education in developing countries are numerous and complex and the privileges extended are many. Lack of participation and understanding on our part as educators, however, will most certainly turn our privileges into constraints and preventions. The price of the alternatives to participation with understanding are too high in terms of world peace. Others less acceptable to our nations could take away our privileges by their participation. Only we can prevent that by our willingness to be involved.

REFERENCES

1. Adiseshiah, Malcolm S. "Education and National Development," UNESCO Chronicle, 13 (Feb. 1967), 51-60.

2. Greenberg, Irvin. "Psychotherapy: Learning and Relearning," Canada's Mental Health Supplement Number 53, XX (September-December, 1966) 3.

3. Hanson, John W. "Educational Tasks for a Nation," in Education and the Development of Nations edited by John W. Hanson and Cole S. Brembeck, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966, 32-43.

4. Jenkinson, Marion D. "Reading: A World Problem," in Reading Instruction: An International Forum, Proceedings on the First World Congress on Reading edited by Marion D. Jenkinson, Newark: International Reading Association, 1966, 14-23.

5. Maheu, Rene. "The World Crisis in Education," UNESCO Chronicle, 13 (Nov. 1967), 413-422.

6. Riesman, David. The Oral Tradition, The Written Word, and The Screen Image. Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1956.

7. Schramm, Wilbur. "Communication Satellites: The New Music of the Spheres," The UNESCO Courier, 21 (Feb. 1968), 24-29.